

Just Say the Word!

Luke 7:1-10

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for October 24, 2021

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Summary: Jesus is about to make a significant turn in His ministry, as He extends the promise of salvation beyond the Jewish community and speaks directly to Gentiles. In Jesus' interaction with a Roman centurion, the expression of faith in Jesus and miraculous healing are no different than what Jesus has previously done in Jewish communities. His promise of salvation is for all the earth.

From what I've learned in school growing up, and recently read about again, the continents are shifting—moving—ever so slightly.

What was called continental drift 75 to 100 years ago, when I was in school, has been replaced by more technical terms today.

But regardless of the terminology, the continent of Australia, for instance, drifts nearly three inches to the northeast every year. Australians don't feel it or see it; the drift is too slow to notice. But it's enough of a shift that it's caused problems with the pinpoint accuracy of GPS.

Three inches might not sound like a lot of movement, but over the past 16 years or so, since that country's GPS was last updated, that country literally moved more than five feet.

So, this began impacting driverless tractors and farmers who depended on exact coordinates, programming military drones, or the mail delivery system; imagine driving your car and GPS tells you to "turn now" but you end up being five feet off the mark.

When I read this, it served as just one more illustration that everything on earth changes—even continents.

But some things never change. God doesn't change, and His Word doesn't change; it's settled forever in the heavens (Psalm 119:89).

Adapted from David Grossman, "Australia's GPS Was Off Because the Whole Country Moved," PopularMechanics.Com (7-29-16); Chris Foxx, "Australia Plans New Co-Ordinates To Fix Sat-Nav Gap," BBC.com (7-29-16)

This was also a reminder to me that because we're living in a constantly drifting culture, we need to constantly

update our internal GPS: where we are and where we're going and what we're doing and how we're living and what we're believing. Update it all to match the unchanging, never shifting, always accurate, Word of God.

I want to show you a man who was guided in a crisis moment in his life by nothing more than the word of Christ.

Take your Bibles and turn to Luke's Gospel with me. We're now in chapter 7 of our study through Luke's first letter to Theophilus—a converted Gentile aristocrat; Luke's second letter to Theophilus is called the Book of Acts.

And Luke tells him—and us—here in chapter 7 and verse 1:

After [Jesus] had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum.

Luke 7:1

Capernaum was this busy city built near a major trade route and it becomes the Lord's home-base of ministry.

Adapted from Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 172

And this summary statement in verse 1 signals a new stage in Jesus' mission and ministry.

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 294

For the first 6 chapters of Luke's Gospel, Jesus has primarily dealt with the Jewish people. But now after finishing His

sermon on the Plateau, He begins to interact with Gentiles.

And here in the Gospel of Luke, this is His first encounter. **Verse 2** introduces us to a Roman centurion.

A centurion was in command of a century of soldiers—100 soldiers.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1 (Zondervan, 2002), p. 383

Centurions were responsible for the discipline and morale of the regiment. They were considered the cement that held the army together. Polybius, the Greek Historian, would write 200 years before the birth of Christ that centurions were “reliable men, not over-anxious to rush into the fight, but when hard pressed, ready to hold their ground, even if it meant dying at their post”.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 1* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 301

These were highly respected military leaders.

And it's no coincidence that Luke will write to Theophilus—a Gentile official—this testimony of a highly respected Gentile officer demonstrating faith in Jesus Christ.

Luke will introduce us to a number of centurions in his letters to Theophilus.

In Luke 23 and in Matthew's parallel account, you have the centurion in charge of Jesus' crucifixion who declares of Jesus out there on Golgotha, ***“Truly this man was the Son of God” (Matthew 27:54).***

In Acts chapter 10, Luke tells us about the conversion of Cornelius, the centurion.

In Acts 21 you have a centurion who rescues the apostle Paul from being beaten to death by a mob.

In Acts 23 you have another centurion who rescues Paul from an assassination attempt.

Later in Acts 23, two centurions and their 200 men take Paul safely to stand trial before the Governor.

In Acts 27, a centurion accompanies Paul to Rome and treats him with respect and even follows Paul's advice when they are shipwrecked on the island of Malta.

Luke brings at least seven Roman centurions into the gospel narrative and reveals that some of them become followers of Christ.

Now notice verse 2:

Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.

Luke 7:2

Luke, the doctor, gives his prognosis that death was literally impending; in other words, there wasn't anything a doctor could do.

Adapted from R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Augsburg Publishing, 1946), p. 389

But we're told here that he was **highly valued** by the centurion; the word for

valued can be translated "honored or respected."

Garland, p. 295

We're not told why. But we are told that it was serious enough to the centurion that he enlisted the help of Jewish leaders in the community.

Verse 3:

When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.

Luke 7:3

There's urgency in this centurion's request; the word for **heal** here is another medical term Dr. Luke uses to describe rescuing someone about to die from a severe illness.

Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 157

This servant has essentially been rushed into the intensive care unit, which is probably why they didn't bring him to Jesus, but asked Jesus to come to him.



What is significant about the fact that this centurion cares about his servant? What does that say about his personal character?

Matthew uses the word for paralysis in his parallel account, which might indicate that at this moment, he's already slipped into a coma and isn't moving.

His life is literally hanging in the balance.

Darrell L. Bock, [Luke: Volume 1](#) (Baker, 1994), p. 636

So, the centurion reaches out to the Jewish elders to get a message to Jesus.

And let me tell you, the Jewish elders don't typically run errands for people, much less Roman centurions.

R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: Volume 1](#) (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 254

But we're told why they did, here in **verse 4**:

And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue."

Luke 7:4-5

They're not just bringing the centurion's request; they're lobbying on his behalf.

Bock, p. 637

And rightly so. This centurion was evidently a follower of God, not a full Jewish proselyte, but a God-fearer.

He loves the nation Israel. How many Roman centurions loved Israel? The word Luke uses is *agapaw*—this is the love that comes from a committed mind and heart; he's made up his mind that he loves

Israel, which indicates his love for the God of Israel.

This is an interesting Roman soldier!

Now we know from history that a centurion was paid 15 times more than the ordinary soldier, making them wealthy, and evidently, he was generous with his wealth.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1 (Zondervan, 2002), p. 383

We're also told here that he had built one of their synagogues! What Roman soldier does this? I can imagine the building committee loved this guy.

We're told in the next verse that Jesus agreed to go with them to the home of the centurion.

Matthew's parallel account has Jesus saying, "***I will go and heal him.***" Keep that in mind, by the way.

Jesus doesn't say, "I will go and take a look at him and see if there's anything I can do."

Douglas Sean O'Donnell, [Matthew](#) (Crossway, 2013), p. 207

No, "I will go and heal him." Jesus is about to prove that what He promises, He produces.

Continents might be shifting and drifting, but His word stands.

Now watch what happens here in **verse 6**:

And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him,

“Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.”

Luke 7:6

Now stop here for a moment; don’t read ahead.

Let me point out two terms the centurion delivers to Jesus. First, he uses the term, **“Lord.”** Now, this could be an expression of honor, like saying, “Sir” to someone out of respect.

However, most often, in these New Testament encounters, believers called Jesus “Lord” because they knew who He was; but unbelievers most often called Him “Teacher” or “Rabbi.”

Adapted from O’Donnell, p. 206

So somewhere in here, this centurion has been doing his homework, and God grants to this Roman soldier the very insight that the Jewish nation is having a hard time getting their minds around.

And based upon his faith in the word of Christ alone, this centurion isn’t referring to Jesus as “Sir” but as the divine Lord.

Lenski, p. 392

So, get this: months before a different centurion announces at the cross of Christ that Jesus was the Son of God, this centurion has essentially arrived at that same conclusion.



Was the centurion granted his request based on his good works in his community, or based on his faith in Jesus Christ? How is this centurion’s spiritual journey similar or different to ours today?

This is the Messiah; this is the anointed One Israel has been longing to receive, and the evidence for that shows up next.

But this centurion realizes something else. Did you notice here in **verse 6**? He sends a new message to Jesus that says:

“I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.”

Luke 7:6b

Don’t miss the obvious play on words here between the Jewish elders and this Roman soldier. In **verse 4**, the elders tell Jesus, “Oh, you have to help him out, *he’s worthy.*”

But the centurion says, “Lord, *I am not worthy.* But since you’re the Messiah—the anointed incarnation of Jehovah—you don’t have to bother taking the time to even come to my home; you don’t even have to visit the ICU; you don’t even have to be in the neighborhood.” **Verse 7:**

“But say the word, and let my servant be healed.”

Luke 7:7b

Just say the word, Lord!

Just say the word, and my servant will be healed!

He goes on to explain in **verse 8**:

“For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.”

Luke 7:8

I say, “Go” and they go!

The word for **Go** here is a military term for “march.”

Reinecker & Rogers, p. 23

I say, “**Do this and they do it**” also has a military ring and snap to it.

Lenski, p. 3945

He’s saying to Jesus, “Look I’m a military man; and I have authority over my 100. And when I tell my men to march, they don’t say, ‘Let me think about it’ or ‘My feet hurt.’ No, they march. And when I tell them to do something they say, ‘Yes Sir, Sir!’”

What’s he saying to Jesus? Get this: he’s saying, “Lord, I can command anything under my authority, and so can You. And since you’re the Lord of the universe, *everything* is under your authority: my paralyzed servant; disease; the power to heal; time and distance; the world; everything is under your command.

Lord, just say the word!”

I wondered as I read this, how responsive are we to God’s Word? How quick are we to march if He says “March!” “My feet hurt; it’ll cause me such inconvenience.”

How ready are we to stop or move or change or believe or obey, just because He said so in His Word?

Let this be our attitude, beloved: “Lord, just say the word!”

Verse 9:

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.”

Luke 7:9

The Jewish elders commended this man’s works; Jesus commended this man’s faith.

Garland, p. 297

And his faith was placed where? In his works? No, but in the words of Jesus.

Just say the word.

Matthew’s Gospel tells us that at this very moment, the centurion’s servant was healed.

Luke records here in his account, in **verse 10**:

And when those who had been sent returned to the

house, they found the servant well.

Luke 7:10

The word **well** is another word out of Luke's medical bag; it's a word that means "in good health."

John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke* (Kregel, 2005), p. 121

That's just as amazing. He hasn't eaten a meal in who knows how long; he's been paralyzed for who knows how long; his life was hanging by a thread; he was at death's door, and suddenly, miraculously, immediately, he's in perfect shape.

Jesus just says the word.

Beloved what is it that we depend upon this very day as believers?

Is it not simply the word of the Lord? He doesn't even have to be in the room where we can see Him or hear Him to believe Him.

J.C. Ryle provoked my thinking when he wrote his expository thoughts on this text, now more than 100 years ago, when he asked the question, "Have you actually seen the book of life—have you seen your name written in there? No? Then how do you know it's in there?"

Because God's word says that believers in the gospel are those **whose names are in the book of life (Philippians 4:3)**.

Have you actually heard Jesus standing in as your advocate before the Father, defending you when you sin? No. So how do you know He is?"

Adapted from J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Evangelical Press, first published, 1879; reprinted 1985), p. 104

His word says: ***My children, when we sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1)***.

How can you be sure that you will go to Heaven to live with Jesus forever? How do you know that's really going to happen?

Because Jesus said: ***I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am, there you will be also (John 14:2)***.

But between here and heaven, how do you know Jesus won't change His mind and abandon you?

Because He said, ***"Look, I am with you always, even until end of time" (Matthew 28:20)***.

David Livingstone, pioneer missionary to Africa in the 1800s said that in every crisis of life he would go back to Matthew 28:20 and he would write in his journal, "This promise is the word of a gentleman of the highest order."

He has given us His word!



What passage of Scripture are you taking confidence in today? Where in the Bible do you find your certainty?

We're living in a day a great uncertainty. It's like the GPS for living has gotten scrambled.

We're living in an age where people are more open than ever to the advice—the counsel—of just about anybody regarding life and death and even life beyond the grave.

Even our secular world is uneasy in its growing suspicion that there is something more out there beyond; there is some cosmic intelligence; there is some universal force.

The question is, where will they look to find the truth? Whose advice will they take? Whose words will they follow?

I was at the store some time ago and an older teenage girl was at the counter. I said, "I hope you're having a good day?" She said, "Well, not really, my foot is hurting" and she went on to tell me that she had been hurt in a soccer game and that it had ruined her hopes of being a dancer.

I just sort of threw out some bait and said, "You know God has a reason for everything, even though we might not understand it."

And she said, "Oh I know, because this injury has given me a lot of time to focus on my religion." I said, "Well there you go—what religion are you?" And she said, "I'm a pagan."

Well, I wasn't expecting that one. I said, "You're a pagan? I know some people

that fit that description but tell me what it means to you."

She said, "I'm studying Wicca and I want to become a witch." I said, "That's interesting, what will you do with that?" She went on to tell me that she was currently studying earth-worship, how to get spiritually in tune with the earth.

I said, "What will you do later on then with your life?" She said, "Well, I'd like to start my own earth church."

I thought it was interesting she still wanted to go to church.

I said, "Well, after you start your earth church, what will you do next?" She said, "I don't know; I'd like to become a schoolteacher." I thought, "I'm glad my kids have already graduated."

I looked at her and said, "After spending your life doing all these things, let me ask you something, what are you going to do a couple minutes after you die?"

She hemmed and hawed and said, "Well, I hope the divine will be good to me." I said, "So you believe there's a God after all?" She said, "Well, no, not like that."

With that our conversation ended as another customer stepped up. I asked her to think about that divine encounter some more and she said she would.

Like the rest of the world around her, her foundation is built on shaky ground—it's all about earth—and I couldn't help but think, even the earth isn't stable, the continents are shifting—drifting—no help

to GPS, no help in providing directions that can last a lifetime.

Where is the word—the counsel—the advice for life that is solid and true and eternal?

Listen to this from Psalm 33:

For the word of the Lord is upright,

And all His work is done in faithfulness.

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made,

And by the breath of His mouth all their host.

Let all the earth fear the Lord;

Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him!

For he spoke, and it came to be;

He commanded, and it stood firm.

The Lord brings the advice of the nations to nothing

But the advice – the word of the Lord stands forever.

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